

Privilege—Mr. Rae

● (1530)

If I am responsible for the decision making on that grant, surely I should be responsible for the decision on how that grant reaches a group of Canadians. I am subject to grievances, concerns or attacks here for the way I do that. However, it seems to me natural enough, as a minister in a government on this side of the House, if I cannot deliver a grant to a particular group, to ask a colleague to do it. It is very foolish and very naive if someone suggests that that is inappropriate.

I take on the responsibility. We are political parties in this House. I am open to criticism at any time by someone from another party that I do not have the right to deliver that cheque or ask somebody to do it on my behalf. However, I want to put that into context because I think there has been some misunderstanding. As the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) pointed out earlier in a similar discussion with the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood, different ministers have different approaches to this particular issue. I am just trying to be open and candid about my approach to my particular responsibility.

There was a misunderstanding in my office of policy in the sending of cheques. If I or a colleague on my behalf delivers a cheque, particularly when an event is taking place, and it is done with a note, as is the practice in my office, it seems to me it is done in a non-partisan manner; I am sure I will hear some hee-haws on the far side to some degree. But it is done on my behalf. We wish them well; we hope they will be successful; we ask them to live up to Treasury Board requirements in accountability.

Some hon. Members: Hee-haw!

Mr. Fleming: As predicted, they have reacted, Madam Speaker. At any rate, it is my view of my ministerial responsibility that if those cheques cannot be presented by me—and I am often invited to do that—or a colleague on my behalf, then I should send them directly. It was a misunderstanding in my office which allowed that incident to happen in the Broadview-Greenwood riding.

In the case of a colleague who came to me, the hon. member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Evans), he asked that I accelerate the presentation of the cheque. Was it going through all right? Were there problems? They needed their money; the event was coming up; he pressed me on that. I telephoned and asked, "Is there any problem? Where is it?" It was brought over.

Mr. McKnight: And you gave him the cheque.

Mr. Fleming: Yes, I gave him the cheque, or he called them and they gave it to him in the office.

I make no apology for my colleagues; I am responsible. I do not expect hon. members on the other side to lean over backwards in kindness to me in carrying out my duty. I expect them to be vigilant. Some may be surprised that I say so, but there are elements of politics, party controversy and confrontation in this House. I am a member of the government. I am one of the representatives of this particular party on the

government side of the House at this time. I am responsible for the decisions I make on grants. I am open to any criticism by any member. If I live under those conditions, I think I have the right to select who I believe can best represent me when there is a cheque to be presented; I had to make a decision on that matter.

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, I should like to take just a moment to underline the terms in which the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae) addressed this issue to Your Honour and to underline the fact that the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) agreed with that position.

Neither of these members has argued that there is what we would call a prima facie case of privilege on which Your Honour would have to rule in that respect, but they have argued that there is a clear analogy between what has been done now and what was done in the latter part of 1979 which produced the statement of Mr. Speaker Jerome.

He said clearly that he did not feel he could call it a question of privilege, but that there was something upon which he needed to comment because it was a case of public money, money voted under the authority of Parliament, being used in a way to bring advantage to one political party. I would urge very strongly that Your Honour study that decision or statement by Mr. Speaker Jerome and give some weight to the suggestion that there is a strong analogy.

I am very sorry, as we all are, that the Deputy Chairman of Committees of the Whole House is away from Parliament because of illness. I wish he could be in on this discussion because it was he who raised the question of privilege in the first place, back in 1979. It was supported by quite a few others; a lot of time and thought were put into it. Most of us think that the comments of Mr. Speaker Jerome were very well put and that perhaps similar comments should be made again.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, I see that you are about to make a ruling. Since my colleagues opposite acknowledge that there is no question of privilege involved, I would simply ask that you settle the matter so that we may go on to the orders of the day. There is absolutely no basis for a question of privilege. They have referred to a ruling made by a former Speaker of the House. With all due respect, I must say that the Standing Orders are there, but it is not up to the Chair to make them. Madam Speaker, your responsibility is to apply them. The grievance has nothing to do with a rule or a practice and I submit that we ought to proceed with the business of the House.

Madam Speaker: Indeed I was about to say that I will take the matter under advisement. I only want hon. members to note that those who rose in this debate referred to a practice. But our practices are not always the object of specific rules for